

Testimony of Jim Posewitz, Helena, Montana
In Opposition to: SB 306
House Natural Resource Committee
March 23, 2011

A BILL FOR AN ACT ENTITLED: "AN ACT CLARIFYING THE PROHIBITION OF CYANIDE HEAP AND VAT LEACH OPEN-PIT GOLD AND SILVER MINING; AND AMENDING SECTION 82-4-390, MCA."

I have been personally engaged in the protection, conservation and restoration of Montana streams for exactly one half century. That work included 32 years with the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, work with non-government citizen groups, and activity as an individual stream conservation advocate.

In that time span Montana enacted the first stream preservation act in the nation, a temporary measure in 1963, made it permanent in 1965, and then expanded it in 1975. In 1969 the State Land Board said no to the Anaconda Company's proposal to dam Alice Creek and thus an open pit mine in the upper Big Blackfoot watershed was averted. Later, the people said no cyanide heap leach mining in that same watershed – we had to say it twice, once in 1998 and again in 2004. During the energy crises of the 1970s power companies and the federal government proposed making eastern Montana the boiler room of the nation. The cooling water was to be about one-third of the Yellowstone's average flow. Montana had the courage to say no to major industrial water demands and the Yellowstone remains the longest free flowing river in the lower 48 states. Then in the 1980s we even took our stream advocacy into Canada and, with their cooperation and consent, avoided a coal mine in the North Fork of the Flathead River.

These examples are but a tiny fragment of the effort Montana people have put into stream conservation through the years. Through the course of those years, a river that lay dead for the better part of a century is now in the process of being brought back to the living. The mining companies that killed it have vanished into a graveyard of their own.

A half century ago we coined the phrase "*Blue Ribbon Streams*" and then two generations of Montanans accepted the responsibility for protecting them and passing those now treasured waters to your generation. In the process we looked around and notice that Montana was indeed the "*Last Best Place*." This sound bite, "*The Last Best Place*" is as much aspiration as it is proclamation. Expanding or protracting cyanide heap and vat leach open-pit mining places this uniquely Montana aspiration in peril.

Please vote NO on SB 306.